



Muslims, not terrorists

DYLAN QUINNELL finds the roots of Islamophobia are grounded in history and politics.

I sit cross legged at the back of the plain room.

Harsh, slanting light pierces the shady interior, illuminating the brightly coloured prayer mats. They point forward, north-west towards the Sacred Mosque in Mecca and the kabah which Muslims believe Allah chose as a place of worship.

Periodically the peaceful silence is punctuated by a whispered "Allah-u-akbar" — God is the greatest — coming from one of the many worshippers rocking forward on his knees.

This, however, confuses me.

The last time I heard "Allah-u-akbar", I was watching a news clip of a suicide bomber.

The "Allah-u-akbar" was zealously chanted by a man in Iraq who had just filmed a fellow fighter turning a 4x4 into a crude yet disturbingly effective fireball as it collided with a US Humvee.

It is hard for many to understand how one religion can be responsible for these two opposite ways of life; one of peace, the other of war.

It is this ignorance that breeds fear, fear that breeds hatred, and hatred that leads to violence.

In July, a British anti-war politician, George Galloway, gave two fiery speeches to overflowing audiences in Auckland; the topic, Islamophobia — a fear of Islam and Muslim people.

He warned that Islamophobia is fallout from the international "War on Terror".

The cause of this is the propaganda war, which must be waged alongside any war.

"How can an undiscerning person be expected to understand that Johnny Muslim in Afghanistan and Iraq is evil, but Tommy Muslim down the road isn't?" said a passionate Galloway.

He spoke of the dilemma of allowing diversity of opinion in New Zealand but not allowing "hate speech" to gain a hold.

"One can ignore it, perhaps like the Jews in Germany did."

Galloway's views find support from the calm and collected Tarek Cherkaoui, a Moroccan born Muslim who has lived in New Zealand for five years and is currently a Phd student at AUT University.

He argues that modern anti-Muslim propaganda is the merging of two discourses: historical Orientalism and modern terrorism.

Orientalism was a discourse used by the Catholic Church around the 12th century with the aim of negatively altering thinking about Muslims in an attempt to slow the rapid spread of Islam.

This discourse has pervaded parts of the Western world and has become so much a part of the fabric of society that many fail to notice its influence.

The latest addition is the more modern idea of terrorism, which allows accusers to sidestep the need for proof of guilt or wrongdoing.

Modern anti-Muslim sentiment is often supported and cultivated by the media who sensationalise events.

Salim Siddiqui is a Pakistani Muslim who has been living and studying in New Zealand for six years and loves the country.

"New Zealand has a culture of understanding, so although they don't understand Islam they don't care, they say 'he's Muslim, that's okay'."

Siddiqui stresses that this suits Islam fine as it is not an exclusive religion.

Followers are taught to respect all others, especially Christians and Jews.

Siddiqui is involved in his new home as an executive member of the AUT Muslim Students Association and also an Auckland City youth councillor.

Five times a day he takes time off from what he's doing to say



PHOTO: DYLAN QUINNELL

ALLAH-U-AKBAR: Muslims pray five times a day.

his prayers, as determined by the prophet Muhammed. If he's at university he heads to the Auckland University prayer room.

He greets fellow Muslims with the traditional "assalam-alaikum" — peace be upon you — as he takes off his shoes and washes his hands, arms and face before finding a spot on one of the rows of prayer mats.

There can be as many as 150 worshippers at any one time during the noon prayers.

To Siddiqui, the beauty of Islam was represented by a situation he found himself in when he met three friends on the way to the prayer room.

"Tunisia, Pakistan, Palestine and Somalia," he said, pointing to himself and his friends.

This global reach is something Islam shares with a few of the world's major religions such as Christianity.

Believers can also be found in parts of South East Asia and even Eastern Europe, in places like Bosnia.

"Other Muslims are my brothers, whether they are from North Africa, Afghanistan, Malaysia.

"That is why when I see in Afghanistan or Iraq, Muslims dying I am sad," says Siddiqui.

Suffian Abdul, a Malaysian Muslim who has lived in New Zealand for almost two years, says sometimes it can depend on the colour of your skin as to whether people identify you as Muslim.

The office assistant for the Federation of Islamic Associations in New Zealand believes the media do sometimes cause Islamophobia.

"Sometimes media, when it comes to Muslims, they will like

to say Muslims are terrorists. It's something they can sell."

The federation's deputy president, Mustafa Farouk, agrees, saying the media is "not giving justice, just giving sound bites and misreporting.

"There is no reporting of issues that involve Muslims, not positive. Muslims are not like some unique form of human beings. We have similar feeling, similar likings. The only thing that is different is that we have a set of beliefs that we adhere to.

"This teaches us to live peacefully with our neighbour, to do to others what we want others to do to us and teaches us to respect others.

"We are like you." Inshallah — God willing — New Zealand's culture of acceptance will continue and Islamophobia will be something New Zealand's almost 36,000 Muslims will not have to deal with.

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"We had worked hard with United Future and it had tremendous potential."

Future New Zealand born again

By Caralise Moore

It is out with the old and in with the new for former United Future MPs Gordon Copeland and Larry Baldock.

On May 17 Copeland resigned from United Future and reformed an independent Future New Zealand (FNZ) party with Larry Baldock, taking former United Future list MP Bernie Ogilvy with him.

Copeland says the party is a potential coalition partner for National.

Destiny New Zealand, a Christian values-based party, is supportive of FNZ. Leader Richard Lewis says both parties will be squeezed for votes if they go head-to-head at the next election.

"Based on our environment now, there is only room for one Christian party. That will present some challenges for any more than one Christian party looking for votes."

FNZ co-leader Larry Baldock agrees with Lewis, and says: "We would prefer to see one Christian party as well. Most voters wouldn't want to see two Christian parties compete for votes."

But Baldock says FNZ couldn't merge with the Destiny party.

"We would lose many supporters. The Destiny party is too associated with Destiny Church. But there are good people in the Destiny party that could join us."

Baldock says they could potentially create a totally new party.

"We are open to a change of name. We haven't registered yet. A totally new party might be achievable."

Lewis says Destiny and FNZ have the right things in common to work together.

"We share a lot of values and common goals with Future NZ, a good basis to work together. The key will be bringing that about and putting a good united front across."

Lewis agrees that starting an altogether new party is the way to go.

United Future leader Peter

Dunne will not comment on Copeland and Baldock forming the new party.

Lewis says Dunne isn't happy and won't make any comment to the media because "if something like this would eventuate, he would be kissing his future goodbye".

Baldock says their leaving was abrupt.

"We had worked hard with United Future and it had tremendous potential. But Peter ignored what party members wanted."

Baldock and Copeland were left quietly confident after the *Sunday Star Times* published a recent poll by UMR research that found that 15 per cent of voters said they would be likely to vote for a new political party "based on Christian moral values".

Out of the poll of 750 voters, 6 per cent said they were "almost certain" to vote for such a party.

However UMR Research's Stephen Mills warns the results had to be taken with a pinch of salt.

"Hypothetical polling of this kind can easily overstate a political party's prospects."

The poll also showed that floating voters are those most likely to be receptive to a Christian morals message.

These results are encouraging for FNZ who need to reach the 5 per cent threshold to make it into Parliament.

"The research shows it's achievable as long as the party is not extreme, has good members and a wide range of policy," says Mills.